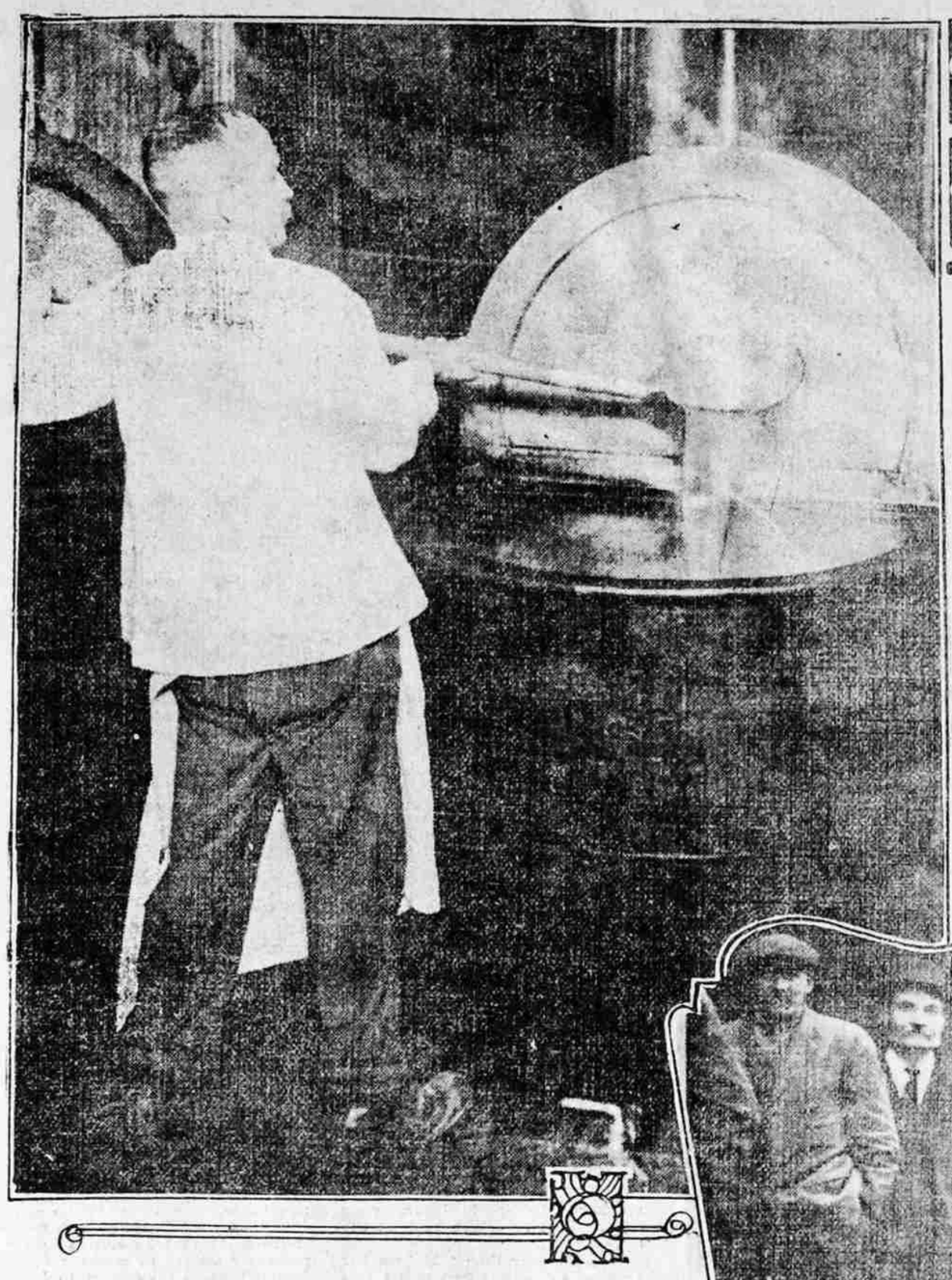

FORMER SOUP LINE PATRON FEEDING THE HUNGRY NOW

Immigrant Lad, Forced to Patronize Philadelphia Charity Table Years Ago, Wins Prosperity by Hard Work But Does Not Forget the Luckless Thousands

The experiences of a penniless immigrant out of work in Philadelphia thirty-two years ago is responsible for at least one of the free soup houses established in this country this year. The penniless immigrant was Albert von Hoffman, now general manager of the National Telephone Directory Company.

In establishing a free soup house for any hungry man who wishes to be fed, Von Hoffman was doing what he had promised himself when he was hardly able to speak English. He came to America from Vienna when 22 years old in 1882. In Vienna he had been an electrical engineer and had wished to follow the occupation when he came to America. He could not speak the language of the Americans and it is hard enough to find work when a man can speak the language of the employer.

Hoffman finally found work with a farmer. The work lasted three months, and while on the farm the young immigrant learned a little about the language of the country of his adoption. Returning to Philadelphia he tried to find work. He was willing to do anything, but there was nothing to do. He tramped the streets day after day, asking for a chance to get something to do so he could feed himself. At last his money was gone. While thinking of a plan to get food he read an announcement of an entertainment at the Y. M. C. A. He could read English a great deal better than he could speak it. At one corner of the announcement it said refreshments would be served at the Y. M. C. A. He translated refreshments to mean food.

He had one man friend in Philadelphia, and could not bring himself to ask for assistance. Nightly he visited the Young Men's Christian Association, and usually a social entertainment was on there at which he partook of ice cream and cake. He left the Y. M. C. A. to seek a sleeping place in the park. In the afternoons he was one of the hundreds of "down-and-outers" who stood in the soup line.

Von Hoffman's first strike of luck came when he practically had reached the end of his endurance, and hope had just about left him. He applied at the general delivery window of the Postoffice in Philadelphia for mail, asking "Is there a letter for Von Hoffmann, from Vienna?" A hand was laid on his shoulder and he turned to face an elderly man.

"If you are a Von Hoffman from Vienna," the stranger said, "I fought with a relative of yours in the War of 1870."

The man had been a comrade of his father in the wars. He gave Von Hoffman work in his factory, and good fortune smiled on him thenceforth.

Today he has a philosophy gained from long association with all classes and types of men—which convinces him that no charity is misplaced.

"The idea of the soup kitchen did not meet with favor in all directions at first," he said. "It was said that it would attract an undesirable type of men, and that professional beggars would be its only guests. That this is wrong has been amply proved since the kitchen was opened. Men won't tramp for miles for a bowl of free soup. Professional beggars won't stand in line for hours for free soup, when by 'panhandling' pedestrians for a half hour or so, they can get nickels and dimes enough to buy food and eat it at their leisure, and be a guest instead of an object of charity."

Von Hoffman says men dressed in the best of clothes, who would easily be taken for prosperous and well-to-do citizens, have stood in the soup line. They are hardup only temporarily, he believes, and are the class who cannot ask charity.

He compares the condition of these men with his own more than thirty years ago and judges their needs and intentions by his own when he faced starvation.

THEORY ALL WRONG, SAY CHARITY EXPERTS.

Von Hoffman's theory of free soup is all wrong, charity experts declare. They say charity should be given after investigations are made. Men should be induced to work. If they know they can get charity food they will not be so anxious to keep their positions, these men who have studied charity questions say.

Von Hoffman remembers only the day when he had an empty stomach and insists his theory is right. He points to the army of hungry men he is feeding every day as the biggest argument that his theory is correct.

"The food is not good enough to cause these men to like that kind of fare," said Von Hoffman. "As soon as they can get a position they leave me. At the same time there is nourishment in the food and it will keep them alive."

Since Von Hoffman opened his soup kitchen with the first touch of winter this year he has fed more than 5,000 men some days. He feeds all who come. He does not ask them if they are hungry. If they are willing to stand in the bread line he believes they are hungry.

A singular thing about these men—these guests of Albert von Hoffmann—is that they are men honestly out of work. Hugging the great brick wall and the stone building of the soup house, they formed a human cordon of shivering, hungry—but not wholly defeated men.

Nearer the entrance they banked two and three deep. There was no aloofness. None of that nice diffidence which places men at arm's length. In the air was a biting chill. From long fasting the blood had lost much of its wealth and heat—and the vitality left was treasured up and passed from one man to another as do sheep huddled in the pasture lands.

The line thinned down at the steps. In ones and twos the free alleyway of the opposite side discharged the temporarily appeased appetites. For these men had become closely akin to the simplest form of the physical world—for now and days to come they will remain appetites.

The matter of obtaining the soup ticket, the giving it again at the second entrance—are only part of the machinery Von Hoffmann's philanthropy has put into action. The thing which touched the heart was rather the eager expression upon their pinched faces as the white bowls were filled with the steaming broth. Then in their other hand, they carried a generous portion of white bread. At tables spread with red oilcloth—bright because of the cheer—and fresh and clean, they sat down upon benches and ate of the fare.

Table after table was emptied and filled again. There was no excitement, no "taking on," no absurdities—just a terrible earnestness. Into the broth they broke their bread. Some ate ravenously—others as thoughtful men who think poignantly and deeply even when hunger hurries the passage of the spoon. But the strange thing was that with the exception of an infirm body here, a crippled frame there—these are men capable of lifting heavy burdens, driving strong hammers, serving faithfully and well.

As they filed out—mere segments of this army of destitution, Von Hoffmann stood at the doorway. He was filled with the joy of the thing. It was in his laugh. His quick, jerky step. He would even grow indignant—yet with a generous indignation.

One man left his bowl. The host of all these Gentlemen Appetites halted him. 'How dare you go out without your bowl," he demanded. "Go back and get your bowl." And the man went back for his bowl.

Into the storeroom he marched after a time with a small group of friends. All about was food—in barrels and bags and boxes.

"Aha," he said, "here are two barrels of noodles." And then he began examining vegetables. A hotel had sent a barrel of onions that had lost the bloom—had fallen into that mature and elderly stage of shrinkage. "Aha," he said again, "and another day we shall have onion soup."

It was suggested to him that perhaps the crowds would become very large—that it would take a great fund. But he poked his hands into his pockets, saying: "So long as there is hunger and men in need I'll run this kitchen."

Frequently men passed in the line who knew him personally, calling him by his name of "Albert" and he would hit them—because he does things most vigorously—and in the thump on the back was the story of how he, too, had one day sought food and kept a grip upon life.

UPPER right—Albert von Hoffmann. Center right shows him at the entrance to his soup kitchen, welcoming hungry men. Other scenes show hungry men snapped about Von Hoffmann's soup kitchen.

"Deutschland Uber Alles."

The German poem, "Deutschland, Deutschland Uber Alles," which has been variously translated and interpreted in this country, sometimes as reflecting a national German spirit of aggressiveness for conquest of the entire world, is explained by the Lokal Anzeiger, a Berlin paper, as meaning not "Germany Over All," but "Dearer Than All Else." The Berlin paper treats the foreign discussion of this popular German poem rather sportively, saying:

"German is a difficult language." The rest of the world will have to console itself with this thought, so long as we barbarians survive. It is, therefore, not to be wondered at that Mr. Lloyd George, in recently explaining 'Deutschland, Deutschland Uber Alles,' in his address in Queen's Hall, fell a victim to a misinterpretation. At that famous meeting, ushered in with the singing of English translations of French, Belgian, Russian and Japanese national anthems, Mr. Lloyd George expressed himself as follows: 'We are battling against the spirit of "Deutschland, Deutschland Uber Alles," which seeks to tear down all that stands in its way.'

"Mr. Lloyd George, according to this, would appear to have as little knowledge of the German attitude as of the German language. We understand that. Those whose national anthem has as its climax the demand for world rule cannot imagine the modest point of view of another people that holds that nothing is higher or nearer than its Fatherland. Robber nations suspect robber sentiments in all; that is merely axiomatic."

The Worm Turns.

"Why do you feed tramps who come along? They never do any work for you." "No," said the wife, "but it is quite a satisfaction to see a man eat a meal without finding fault with the cooking."—New York Sun.

MODEL TOWN NEAR NEW YORK CITY DESERTED WHEN WORK CEASES

About twenty-five miles inland from Kingston, N. Y., lies a beautiful model town, now deserted, but ready in every detail for occupancy. Unless interests can be aroused to preserve it the town will be absolutely wiped out.

This village was built by the great Ashokan Dam contractors and was used by the engineers and workmen during the construction work. Now that the dam is finished the men who erected the buildings are obliged by their contracts to leave the ground clear of all incumbrances. The Neighborhood Workers' Association is working to preserve the town intact, and plans for its future use have been made.

Miss Mary de Gray Trenholm, head worker of the East Side Settlement House, is co-operating with the neighborhood workers and has enlisted the aid of all the settlements and people interested in such work.

"At present," said Miss Trenholm, "there are numbers of places where persons in poor health may go for the summer and find excellent accommodations and the best of living conditions at moderate cost, but there is practically no place where those in health may go to preserve their health and give their families the benefit of outdoors. The camps do not supply the demand nor meet all the requirements. This property belongs to the City of New York and we are endeavoring to get from the city an appropriation for the work we aim to do. We do not ask the city to finance the scheme entirely, but merely to aid us with a reasonable amount, the rest to be made up by contributions.

"This town, as yet unnamed, contains 400 house. They are small frame affairs, built with an eye to convenience and comfort for summer occupants. Here 400 families could be accommodated, and the rental would not exceed $5 a week each. The place is not too far from the city, but created in the mountains high and dry, and the worker in New York could go out every week end.

"The houses are models of construction and drainage, the work having been done by expert engineers. There is an electric light plant, the streets are well paved and lighted, there is a clubhouse, gymnasium, bakeshop, storehouse, ice plant, barber, tailor and shoe shop, a schoolhouse, a bandstand, and a cold storage house, so you see everything is ready at hand. Each cottage has a little garden plot. There are also six large dormitories within easy walking distance in a house formerly used as a boarding place. The houses would be furnished, not expensively, but neatly.

"The plan is to have a large community store, for of course families would wish to do their own housekeeping. For this the building used as a commissary department is admirably fitted. We feel certain that in a short time the property would be more than self-supporting, but a certain amount of capital is required for the beginning.

"Settlement workers are really experimenters in many directions; this would be an experiment conducted under the auspices of the combined settlement houses of New York City, and when the work had been proved a success and was running smoothly it could be turned over to the care of the city if desired."

A New One.

"Don't you think that the Muscovite onslaught is awful?" "I've never tried it; can you show me the steps?"—Stanford Chaparral.